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Linden, David van der

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5 Memory, Toleration, and Conflict after the French Wars of Religion

David van der Linden

In 1598 King Henry IV issued the Edict of Nantes, which famously ended the French Wars of Religion (1562–1598) by installing a regime of religious toleration. The edict allowed French Calvinists – also known as Huguenots – to publicly worship alongside the Catholic majority and granted them a range of civic rights, including access to the courts, public office, schools, and hospitals. Yet the king was well aware that if this state-sanctioned experiment in toleration was to succeed, both confessions had to refrain from seeking retribution for the massacres, forced displacements, and looting of property that had punctuated the wars. The first article of the Edict of Nantes thus ordered French men and women to forget the troubles, decreeing that “the memory of all things that have happened on either side shall remain extinguished and suppressed, as if they had never taken place.”¹

The aim of this chapter is to examine the relationship between toleration and memory in the aftermath of the French religious wars. Historians have often argued that the Edict of Nantes ushered in a period of coexistence, as they have found evidence in communities across France that toleration before the law translated into cross-confessional interactions. For example, Catholics and Protestants were able to regulate their religious differences through pragmatic arrangements, including parity in law courts and government, the sharing of cemeteries, and the construction of Protestant churches outside Catholic towns. In many cities, they also did business together and intermarried.² Yet the past was never entirely forgotten. As this chapter will argue, Catholics and Protestants continued to revisit the wars throughout the seventeenth century, in particular the violence and material losses they had suffered at the hands of the other. Tales of cold-blooded murder and iconoclastic fury allowed them to solidify a group identity based on victimhood, but they also fuelled religious hatred and undermined coexistence. These memories, moreover, were passed down to future generations who had not lived through the wars, thus perpetuating religious tensions for decades. As such, memories of civil war formed a major obstacle to toleration and had the potential to undo the fragile bonds between the two confessions.

To understand the relationship between memory and toleration, this chapter adopts a local approach. Given that both the remembering of past events and

the getting along with members of another faith are social practices above all – in other words, they are things that people *do* – we can only study these phenomena on the ground. My focus will be on the post-war memory cultures of La Rochelle, a port city on the Atlantic coast that initially refused to be drawn into the religious wars, until in 1568 the Huguenots seized control of urban government and banned Catholic worship. La Rochelle would remain a bastion of the Reformed movement for three decades, until the Edict of Nantes forced the Protestants to allow the reintroduction of Catholicism. Comparing the memory practices of Catholics and Huguenots in this bi-confessional city after 1598 reveals the extent to which the troublesome past could exert a powerful, even destructive influence on future generations.

Memory and toleration

Before exploring these local tensions, it is important to stress that the concept of “memory” has spawned a wide range of definitions and approaches, in large part because it has attracted scholarly attention from such diverse fields as psychology, sociology, philosophy, literary studies, and history. Strictly speaking, memory is individual and inaccessible to the historian: what people think or remember remains private, unless they choose to share their thoughts with others. Crucial to the study of memory, then, are the ways in which people communicate their memories, either in written form – such as chronicles, diaries, petitions, and court testimonies – or as a material vector, including devotional objects, paintings, and monuments. These “acts of remembering” offer a valuable, if imperfect, testimony of what individuals and communities deem important to remember and transmit to future generations. As Judith Pollmann has argued, memory can be defined as “a form of individual or collective engagement with the past that meaningfully connects the past to the present.”³

Memory studies have indeed become a flourishing field of historical inquiry, as historians explore the ways in which communities throughout time have remembered their past. Much of this scholarship has focused on the emergence and evolution of a so-called “collective memory”: a corpus of memories that is shared by a group of people to such an extent that it comes to define their communal identity and self-understanding. The term was first coined by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. In his book *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), and again in his posthumous *La mémoire collective* (1950), Halbwachs argued that individual memories are dependent on what he called a “social framework”: the people, beliefs, and culture to which we belong function as a blueprint that determines how we remember and transmit the past. Ultimately, Halbwachs suggested, our memories are social constructs, more like variations on a common theme than truly unique expressions of our lived past.⁴

Halbwachs’ ideas have had a major impact on the field of memory studies as it has developed since the 1990s, especially through the work of the German

historians Jan and Aleida Assmann. They have emphasised that remembering also requires forgetting: whenever people enshrine the past, they will select only the most memorable stories for safekeeping and discard those deemed unfit for remembrance. Jan Assmann has noted that historical events initially produce a wealth of personal testimonies that together constitute a “communicative memory”; some people will undoubtedly know more than others, but there are no obvious experts. Over the course of one or more generations, however, memory brokers will select the most relevant memories and weave them into a larger, canonical narrative, which Assmann has labelled “cultural memory.” Aleida Assmann has likewise observed that although people have access to a vast reservoir of stories about the past – what she calls a “stored memory” – they will select just a few of these stories to create a “functional memory” and forget about the others.⁵

This creation of cultural and functional memories offers a fruitful avenue for studying the history of early modern toleration. By examining how Catholics and Protestants chose to remember the Wars of Religion, we can get a better sense of how both confessions asserted their religious identity and negotiated their relationship with others – what it meant to be a Catholic or Protestant in a multi-confessional society. Indeed, the link between memory and identity is crucial to understanding practices of toleration: we need memories to know who we are and where we belong, but memories can also set us apart from others and fuel conflict. Historians of the Reformation have called the process of carving out religious identities at the expense of other denominations “confessionalisation,” as Catholics and Protestants increasingly stressed the doctrinal and ritual differences that separated them.⁶ This chapter will suggest, however, that memories of suffering and past injustice also contributed to the erection of barriers between Protestants and Catholics. In the case of post-war France, two questions will guide this exploration. First, what choices did Huguenots and Catholics make when they remembered the past? And second, what impact did these memories have on religious coexistence between the two groups after 1598? As we shall see, post-war France was a nation divided by memory: although the Edict of Nantes had ostensibly pacified the kingdom, Catholics and Protestants developed antagonistic memories that stressed victimhood and called for retribution, which ultimately undermined the policy of religious toleration.

Remembering and forgetting the Wars of Religion

Although men and women in early modern France were unfamiliar with our modern concepts of collective and cultural memory, they were acutely aware that some form of memory management was required to avoid future conflict. King Henry IV in particular realised that publicly remembering the war’s massacres, sieges, and profanation of sacred property would only perpetuate animosity between Catholics and Protestants, which explains why in the Edict of Nantes he ordered his subjects to leave the past behind. The king also

prohibited Frenchmen from seeking redress in court and instructed public prosecutors not to investigate crimes committed during the troubles.⁷ Henry's decision to bury the memory of the religious wars was hardly novel, as early modern rulers believed almost universally that the forgetting of wartime offences was the best way forward to secure peace and reconciliation. These so-called oblivion clauses were a key element of pacification treaties across Europe, including the Pacification of Ghent (1576) in the Low Countries, the Act of Oblivion (1660) after the English civil war, and the Westphalian Treaty of 1648.⁸ The Edict of Nantes likewise drew on previous oblivion clauses, which had been included in each of the pacification edicts issued by the monarchy during the Wars of Religion. The 1563 Edict of Amboise that had ended the first religious war, for example, stipulated that "all insults and offenses, which the inequity of time and the occasions that have arisen as a result may have caused between our subjects, as well as all other things that have occurred or were caused by the present turmoil, shall remain extinguished, as if they are dead, buried, and never took place."⁹ Subsequent peace edicts would repeat this clause, until it was integrated into the Edict of Nantes.

The most pressing reason for the monarchy to issue such oblivion clauses was to wipe the slate clean, ensuring that old hatreds would not destroy a hard-won peace. French legal scholars of the time amply theorised the necessity of forgetting the past, in order to transition France from civil war to durable peace and concord. Foremost among them was Antoine Loisel, a lawyer in the Parlement de Paris (the most important court of appeal in France), who, quoting the ancient orator Titus Labienus, argued that *optima belli civilis defensio oblivio est* ("the best defence against civil war is oblivion").¹⁰ Because remembering past injustices only helped to "embitter and renew old wounds," Loisel argued that the best remedy was "to efface everything as quickly as possible, to ensure that nothing remains in the minds of the people on either side, and to never speak or think of it again."¹¹

Yet Loisel's passionate defence of expunging the past does not explain how Henry IV expected people to forget about the religious troubles. After all, the monarchy could not police the minds of those who had experienced the wars. Scholars have argued, however, that the aim of these oblivion clauses was not necessarily to impose forgetfulness, but to control public discourse about the past. Both the Edict of Nantes and the preceding edicts of pacification issued a moratorium on evoking or investigating the troubles, which was not quite the same as ordering complete forgetfulness. Injustices committed during the wars were never formally pardoned; rather, by pretending they had never occurred, the monarchy prevented people from acting upon their knowledge of the past, in particular in courts of law. In essence, oblivion was a form of legal amnesia to prevent future conflict.¹² The monarchy essentially hoped that as long as Frenchmen conformed to the public fiction that the religious conflict had never existed, it was possible that its private memory would slowly fade away, too.

Yet despite attempts to police evocations of the past and promote religious coexistence, the wars were not easily forgotten. Recent scholarship

has demonstrated that men and women in cities throughout France in fact continued to remember the wars and passed down memories of wartime injustices to future generations.¹³ The remainder of this chapter will analyse how in one such locality – the city of La Rochelle – Catholics and Protestants evoked the troubles, and what impact these memories had on practices of toleration. To do so, I will draw on a wide range of memory vectors, including chronicles and petitions as well as material remains, processions, and paintings – at a time when the majority of the urban population was illiterate, material memories were crucial in transmitting stories about the troublesome past.

Chronicling massacre

An obvious way to understand how people remembered the religious wars is to examine the individual testimonies they left behind. Many French citizens composed chronicles to keep a chronological record of events in their city, which could take the form of diaries, retrospective memoirs, or full-fledged histories based on extensive archival research. These chronicles were seldom composed as introspective autobiographies that allowed the author to explore their emotional response to the violence; rather, they recorded their experiences as exemplary tales for future generations, confident in the belief that the past offered useful lessons.¹⁴ Memories of religious violence figured prominently in these chronicles, in particular the many massacres that had occurred throughout the wars, as Catholics and Protestants attempted to purge the urban community of heresy – what, today, we would call ethnic cleansing. Chronicles that discussed these killings are highly indicative of local confessional tensions, since authors typically assigned blame for the violence and wrestled with the question whether or not they should exculpate their own community.

Most scholarship has focused on Protestant accounts of victimhood, in particular regarding the 1572 St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, when Catholics killed an estimated 10,000 Huguenots in Paris and other provincial cities. Yet historians have shown that Protestants also massacred Catholic clergy and citizens in many of the towns they seized by stealth, in particular during the second religious war of 1567–68.¹⁵ Among the key cities affected by this wave of violence was La Rochelle, which was seized by the Huguenots in February 1568. The city's Reformed church had attracted a large number of followers since its official foundation in 1558, including the royal governor Guy Chabot de Jarnac, the city mayor Jean Pineau, and 60 of the 100 *pairs et échevins* (city councillors). Yet the outbreak of civil war in 1562 deeply divided the Huguenot party. A faction of radicals tried to seize control of the city and join the Protestant war effort, but they were thwarted by Jarnac and moderate Protestants on the city council, who successfully defended the city's neutrality and maintained an uneasy religious coexistence with La Rochelle's Catholic population. All of this changed during the second religious war, when the new Protestant mayor François Pontard orchestrated a

coup to seize La Rochelle for the Huguenot commander-in-chief, the Prince of Condé. On the morning of January 9, 1568, Pontard led his supporters through the streets, calling the Huguenots to arms and spreading a rumour that the Catholics were plotting to massacre them. After Pontard had wrested control of the city, he invited the sieur Jean de Sainte-Hermine, a lieutenant of Condé, to rule La Rochelle as military governor. Pontard also arrested and imprisoned some 100 inhabitants, including prominent Catholics, all remaining priests and friars, and moderate Protestants who had opposed his coup. The massacre occurred towards the end of February (none of the sources report a precise date), when 27 clergymen held at the medieval Tour du Garrot – also known as the Tour de la Lanterne – were stabbed to death by Huguenot soldiers, who threw their mutilated bodies into the sea below. The men also killed the Protestant prisoner Jacques de la Roue, a *huissier* (usher) in the *présidial* court of La Rochelle and one of Pontard's most vocal critics.¹⁶

Perhaps not surprisingly, Protestants largely kept silent about the massacre. The city council's official apology for joining forces with Condé, written by the Huguenot *avocat* Jean de La Haize, made no mention of the violence but argued that the takeover of La Rochelle had been necessary to protect the freedom of conscience and defend the interests of the entire French nation.¹⁷ The only contemporary mention of the massacre by a Protestant author occurs in an anonymous chronicle, known as the Baudoin manuscript (so named after its most likely owner), which covers the city's history from medieval times until 1589. The author tried to minimise Protestant culpability, arguing that the capture of La Rochelle had happened peacefully and blaming the massacre on the new governor Sainte-Hermine, who as an outsider had quickly antagonised the Rochelais by imposing heavy taxes and forcing them to construct new fortifications. The chronicler went on to claim that it was the governor who had ordered the priests to jump to their deaths from the Tour du Garrot, thus further absolving the city's Protestants from any wrongdoing.¹⁸

As perpetrators, the Protestants had every reason to forget the violence or deflect accusations of rebellion, but more surprising is that Catholics hardly spoke about their suffering either. One of the few Catholic sources to mention the massacre is a chronicle kept by the notary Antoine Bernard, who lived 200 km away in the town of Langon, southeast of Bordeaux. News of the killings was reported to him by an eyewitness, François Miglet, who told that the Huguenots had arrested 13 clergymen, "whom they led to the Tour du Garrot, and bound their hands behind their back, and, at the hands of the executioner, threw them down into the sea."¹⁹ The main reason for the lack of Catholic memories in La Rochelle was the Huguenot coup of 1568, which had profoundly altered the confessional balance of power and put limits on what could be remembered. The new city council led by Pontard immediately banned Catholic worship and confiscated the property of those who had fled the city. Successive edicts of pacification only restored Catholicism temporarily, which meant its members struggled to survive in an otherwise Protestant city.²⁰ The Huguenot domination of La Rochelle

also made it possible to impose a partisan memory of the wars and silence counter-narratives. The local Protestant consistory did not hesitate to censure histories that portrayed the wars too even-handedly or that cast doubt on the Huguenot cause. In 1581, for example, the city's leading minister Odet de Nort persuaded the national synod meeting in La Rochelle to censure and subsequently redact the *Histoire de France* by the local historian Lancelot Voisin de La Popelinière, who had suggested the Reformation was the result of popular rebellion and "opinionated" men.²¹

Although the 1598 Edict of Nantes permitted the re-establishment of Catholic worship in La Rochelle, thus making possible the potential recovery of memories about the 1568 massacre, it was not until after the royal siege of 1628 that most exiled Catholics returned to the city. By this time, however, 60 years had passed since the massacre occurred, which explains why it had almost disappeared from urban consciousness. It was precisely to rescue the massacre victims from oblivion that the Augustinian friar Simplicien Saint-Martin included a lengthy overview of friars martyred during the wars in his *Histoire de la vie du glorieux père St Augustin* (1641). Although Saint-Martin served as a professor of theology at the University of Toulouse, rather than in one of La Rochelle's monasteries, he regretted the lack of local chronicles that documented the massacre victims and chastised previous generations for not telling their story. It was crucial "to collect these precious fragments," he wrote, "lest in time their memory should be lost."²² He began his martyrology with the massacre at La Rochelle, offering details not included in Protestant chronicles: Saint-Martin claimed that governor Sainte-Hermine had arrested no fewer than 77 members of the clergy and commanded them to abjure their faith. When they refused to recant, the Huguenots dragged them to the Tour du Garrot, where they were chained in pairs and thrown down into the sea. Based on documents Saint-Martin had consulted (but did not cite), he believed that as many as 20 Augustinian friars had perished in the massacre.²³ All in all, memories of the 1568 massacre followed a predictable confessional path: Catholics gradually came to identify as victims, while the Huguenots tried to avoid being portrayed as rebels who had resorted to violence.

The memory of iconoclasm

Whereas the 1568 massacre was nearly lost in the fog of time, memories of the material losses suffered by La Rochelle's Catholics persisted throughout the seventeenth century, fuelling tensions between the two faiths. The Protestant iconoclasm that had virtually obliterated the sacred landscape had left deep scars among Catholics, both physical and spiritual. Prior to the Reformation, La Rochelle comprised five parish churches and eight monasteries, all of which had been founded in medieval times; the nearest cathedral was located in Saintes, some 70 km to the southeast.²⁴ The first iconoclasm occurred in the spring of 1562, just after the outbreak of the civil war. La Rochelle's clandestine Reformed community still worshiped in private, but on 31 May

the Huguenot ministers Pierre Richer and Ambroise Faget organised a public celebration of the Lord's Supper on the Place de la Bourserie, an event attended by several thousand Protestants and governor Jarnac. In their sermon, the ministers denounced the recent massacre of Huguenot worshippers at Vassy and the lacklustre efforts of the monarchy to prosecute the perpetrators. The sermon prompted a crowd of between 200 and 300 Protestants to sack all Catholic churches in town, pulling down statues and destroying altars.²⁵ A second round of destruction took place after the Huguenot coup of 1568. Under the leadership of mayor Pontard and governor Sainte-Hermine, Catholic worship was proscribed and virtually all the churches and monasteries were razed to the ground, their ecclesiastical goods appropriated, and their stones repurposed for the construction of military fortifications. Only the belltowers of St Sauveur and St Barthélémy were left standing, to serve as watchtowers and platforms to attack Catholic assailants with canon fire.²⁶

Protestant chroniclers agreed that the less said about the iconoclasm, the better. Although Calvin had argued that worshipping images was idolatrous, he had also condemned acts of vandalism against Catholic churches. Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, likewise insisted that only public authorities were entitled to remove images, not individual worshippers in a frenzy of violence. In his *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées au royaume de France* (1580), Beza thus attributed most of the iconoclastic incidents to a few madmen, arguing that Protestant consistories had never condoned the violence.²⁷ Although he failed to mention the destructions in La Rochelle, local authors adopted his line of defence. The Protestant author of the Baudoin chronicle, for example, mentioned the destructions of 1568 only in passing, while he portrayed the 1562 iconoclasm as an orderly event, noting that "all the idols were torn down and the greater part of the altars destroyed in the churches of La Rochelle, without any tumult or death of any papist or anyone else."²⁸

Following the re-establishment of Catholic worship in 1598, Huguenot authors who had not witnessed the events nonetheless felt compelled to defend the iconoclasm of the previous generation. The Huguenot magistrate Amos Barbot, who composed a chronicle of La Rochelle's history in the 1610s, unequivocally blamed the destructions on the *menu peuple* ("the common people") and argued that the Protestant leadership – although they agreed with the removal of images – had not participated in the iconoclasm for fear of being prosecuted. According to Barbot, governor Jarnac had publicly protested his innocence and promised to arrest the perpetrators, although in the end just two men were apprehended.²⁹ The Huguenot minister Philippe Vincent made a similar distinction in his local history of the Reformed church, written around 1650 (it was only published in 1693). He strongly condemned the iconoclasm as "a sickness that was almost universal," but at the same time he pointed his finger at a select group of image-breakers who had taken matters into their own hands, writing that "for private individuals to undertake this of their own accord, with violence and turmoil, is absolutely seditious and

an attack on the authority of the magistrate.” Having consulted the consistory acts of the Reformed church, moreover, he assured his readers that the Huguenot ministers had firmly denounced the iconoclasm.³⁰ This crucial distinction between seditious plundering and state-ordered iconoclasm explains why Vincent did not denounce the stripping of the altars in 1568, which had been sanctioned by the authorities: he noted matter-of-factly that on 9 January, mayor Pontard “issued an order to the inhabitants to enter the churches and break and destroy all the images.”³¹

Whereas La Rochelle’s Protestants tried to deflect accusations of guilt, Catholics never forgot the destructions. Because the Edict of Nantes granted them the right to worship in La Rochelle, their chief aim was to restore the sacred landscape and seek compensation for the destructions committed by the Huguenots. This campaign required the systematic recollection of past losses, which inevitably brought them into conflict with the city’s Protestants. The immediate context for remembering the troubles was the arrival in the summer of 1599 of two royal commissioners, appointed by Henry IV to ensure that the terms of the edict – including the restoration of Catholic worship – were applied throughout France. Composed of one Catholic and one Protestant, these bipartisan commissions were also authorised to receive petitions and issue religious settlements. The commissioners sent to the Poitou and Aunis regions, the Catholic *maître de requêtes* Martin Langlois and the Protestant lieutenant-general Jean de la Parabère, arrived in La Rochelle on 25 July.³² They were taken on a tour of the city by two Catholic delegates that lasted several days, during which they were shown the churches, convents, and cemeteries that were now either occupied by Protestants or laid to waste during the wars (Figure 5.1). The commissioners’ report meticulously charted the Catholic losses: the parish church of St Nicolas, for example, was found “to be entirely ruined, without the foundations being visible, and the larger part of this church as well as the cemetery enclosed in the fortifications.” Little more remained of the church of St Jean du Perrot, except “part of the belltower to about the second floor, which is all bricked up and currently serves as a gunpowder depot.”³³

After further consultations with both parties, Langlois and Parabère issued what they believed to be an even-handed settlement. Whereas the churches of Notre Dame de Cougnes and St Nicolas were considered lost, given that the Protestants had incorporated them into the urban fortifications, they allowed Catholics to rebuild the ruined churches of St Sauveur, St Jean du Perrot, and St Barthélémy. They would have to fund the reconstruction out of their own pocket, however, because no financial reparations were awarded – article 76 of the Edict of Nantes explicitly stipulated that the Huguenots could not be prosecuted for the “burning and destruction of churches.” In the end, the commissioners only returned the surviving church of Ste Marguerite, which the Protestants had used for their own services.³⁴ The Protestant town council grudgingly accepted these conditions, but did not interfere when on August 4, a crowd of women, children, and artisans broke into Ste Marguerite to smash the windows, pulpit, and floorboards. The Catholics subsequently took

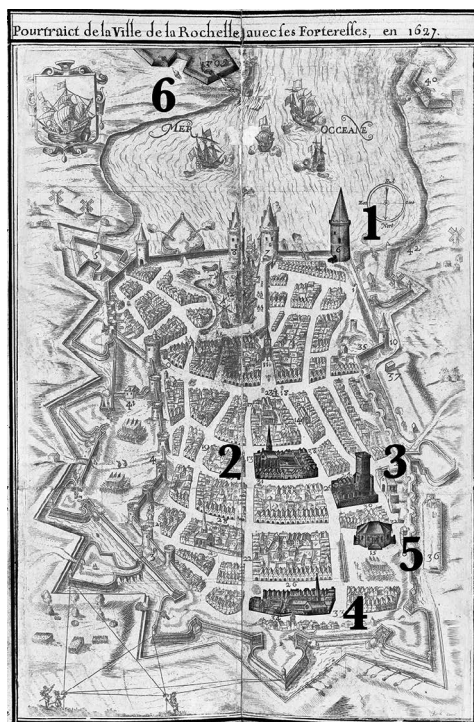


Figure 5.1 Map of La Rochelle in 1627. Médiathèque Michel Crépeau, La Rochelle, 3PL988-10. Design: Ruben Verwaal. Key sites: 1. Tour du Garrot; 2. Town hall; 3. Belltower of St Barthélémy; 4. Church of Ste Marguerite; 5. Huguenot Grand Temple; 6. Military camp of Coreille, site of the Minim monastery.

possession of their damaged building during a solemn Mass led by the bishop of Saintes, who also consecrated the ruins of St Barthélémy and organised a procession between the two recovered churches – a visual reminder that the Catholics were reclaiming their position in La Rochelle.³⁵

The departure of Langlois and Parabère on August 9, revealed just how fragile religious coexistence was, as the Catholics remained a small minority in a city dominated by Protestant authorities reluctant to implement the edict. The ruined church of St Barthélémy became the focal point of the conflict over sacred space: while Catholics undertook the arduous task of rebuilding their church, Protestants tried to prevent its reconstruction. Matters came to a head in November 1603, when mayor Louis Berne entered the construction site accompanied by a group of archers, ordering the workmen to halt their work and imprisoning one of them without a warrant. When two of the workmen returned on Monday, they were beaten with clubs and chased out of the city. Meanwhile, a crowd of Protestants destroyed the newly carved saints' statues that had been placed inside the partially restored church.³⁶ In response, the

Catholic churchwardens began legal proceedings against the mayor in the local *présidial* court, demanding that the peace commissioners' settlement be respected and the ongoing reconstruction of St Barthélémy not be hindered.³⁷ Yet the cards were firmly stacked against them: in a petition to Henry IV, the Catholics noted that the presiding judge Jehan Pascault was a committed Huguenot, while his Catholic counterpart Jehan Cambin had recently converted to Calvinism. When royal commissioners visited La Rochelle again in 1617, the Catholics still complained that their church was "useless" because of ongoing Protestant opposition.³⁸ Memories of material loss thus fuelled religious conflict between the two confessions long after the wars had officially ended.

Material memories, old and new

The memory wars between La Rochelle's Catholics and Protestants entered a new round in the aftermath of the last war of religion. In 1620, King Louis XIII led his army across southern France to occupy the independent Protestant principality of Béarn, where he forcibly restored Catholic worship. Alarmed by this royal show of force, in December 1620 Protestant leaders headed by the Duke of Rohan met in La Rochelle, where they resolved to take up arms to defend the Reformed cause. Their uprising ended in spectacular defeat: between 1621 and 1629, royal armies besieged and occupied the rebellious Huguenot cities in southern France, including Montauban, Montpellier, and, most famously, La Rochelle.³⁹ The capture of La Rochelle in October 1628 did little to resolve the conflict between the two communities. As exiled Catholic citizens and clergy returned to rebuild their churches and monasteries, they developed a defiant memory culture that recalled both the losses they had suffered and their ultimate triumph over heresy. Given that Catholic identity, in contrast to Protestant self-understanding, was rooted more in the material – in particular, the maintenance of centuries-old ritual practices and the cherishing of objects – it is not surprising that Catholic memory was conveyed primarily through material vectors such as church buildings, inscriptions, and processions. Even under normal circumstances, processions and sacred space could spark conflict between the confessions, but they gained in commemorative significance in the aftermath of the wars, when Catholics also came to understand them as references to their recent suffering. Precisely because they used the public sphere to remember the wars, the simmering conflict with the city's Protestants was further escalated.

The importance La Rochelle's Catholics attached to remembering the wars is evident from the capitulation treaty that Louis XIII issued in November 1628. The king not only re-established Catholic worship in La Rochelle and banned the settlement of Protestant immigrants, but also decreed a series of measures aimed at restoring the sacred landscape and remembering the troubles through visual and material markers. First, he ordered the rebuilding of all ruined churches and monasteries and the restitution of confiscated Catholic property to their rightful owners. Furthermore, the Protestant

church built on the Place du Château (known as the Grand Temple) was handed over to the Catholics, to be turned into a cathedral with a resident bishop, and a cross planted on the square bearing an inscription that commemorated the royal victory. In the decades following the siege, La Rochelle became a massive construction site, as Catholics rebuilt no less than three parish churches and nine monasteries.⁴⁰ The restoration of the sacred landscape was both an act of remembering and forgetting: on the one hand, it visually marked the triumph of Catholicism, but, on the other, it sought to efface the period of Huguenot rule and the destructions it had entailed.

The most poignant of these building projects was the establishment of a new monastery at the former military encampment south of the city, next to the graveyard of fallen Catholic soldiers. The monastery was headed by the Minim friars of Touraine, who had served Louis' army as chaplains during the siege. The king decreed that at the entrance to the future church of the Minims' monastery – aptly named Notre Dame des Victoires – two plates should be affixed to commemorate his victory and the soldiers who had fallen in battle.⁴¹ By the early eighteenth century, the monastery had fallen into disrepair and was demolished, but when the royal engineer Claude Masse visited the site in 1711, the cemetery still remained, as did the inscription. Below the arms of Louis XIII, two tablets recalled the Catholic triumph of 1628: “Halt, Christians, and admire this trophy of piety and glory, whose worthy author is Louis XIII, who has subjected the rebellious, insolent, and heretical La Rochelle to the law of God and of his Church, as well as to that of his sceptre.” The inscription went on to declare that “in order that the memory of such an august victory might be remembered for centuries to come, his majesty had this church and convent built, [...] wishing that the place which had been the scene of his battles should be an eternal mark of his piety.”⁴² The inscription thus drove home the message that the Minim monastery served as a monument marking the downfall of La Rochelle's Protestants.

Another key material memory appeared in the church of Ste Marguerite, the only one of the medieval parish churches to have survived the Wars of Religion. Although it had been returned to the Catholics in 1599, when war broke out in 1621, the Protestant city council again confiscated the building and voted to banish the Oratorian priests who served it. By the priests' own account, a Protestant crowd had threatened to massacre them, as they wrote that the monastery was “besieged by an infinite number of people who wanted that they be thrown over the walls, each of them shouting at the top of their voices that they would not allow them to leave their city alive.”⁴³ The reconsecration of Ste Marguerite on All Saints' Day 1628 by Henri d'Escoubleau de Sourdis, the bishop of Maillezais and future archbishop of Bordeaux, thus held special significance for La Rochelle's Catholics, whose other places of worship still lay in ruins. Due to a lack of funds, it would take until mid-century before the churchwardens could afford to properly renovate the church interior. In 1665 they commissioned an altarpiece of their patron saint from the local artist Pierre Courtilleau, who delivered his work



Figure 5.2 Pierre Courtilleau, *Entry of Louis XIII in La Rochelle on November 1, 1628*, oil on panel, 185 × 143 cm.

Courtesy of Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Rochelle (MAH.1952.13.1).

in 1668 ([Figure 5.2](#)).⁴⁴ The painting depicts the key players in the Catholic reconquest of La Rochelle, framed against the cityscape in the background, including the belltowers of St Sauveur and St Barthélémy. In the foreground, Louis XIII is flanked by Cardinal Richelieu, while on the right the bishop of Maillezais is accompanied by father Jousseau, the superior of the Oratorian priests. Towering in the sky is Saint Margaret the Virgin, martyred in AD 304 for refusing to renounce her Christian faith, as she straddles the dragon sent by Satan to devour her. The painting thus symbolically commemorated the wartime suffering of La Rochelle's Catholics, who despite Huguenot persecution had persevered in their faith as had Saint Margaret, until they triumphed over the monster of heresy.

While it is difficult to know how Protestants responded to these material memories, Catholic efforts to reclaim the public sphere by means of processions sparked immediate conflict. The first Catholic procession took place on November 1, 1628, the day Louis XIII entered his reconquered city: after Cardinal Richelieu had celebrated Mass at the reconsecrated church of Ste Marguerite, the king participated in a general procession led by Capuchin

and Recollect friars carrying crosses and relics, while they sang the celebratory hymn *Te Deum laudamus*.⁴⁵ The king also decreed that henceforth, a commemorative annual procession was to be held on this date to celebrate the capture of La Rochelle.⁴⁶ Processions to commemorate the Wars of Religion – in particular foiled Huguenot sieges or deliverance from Protestant rule – were a common feature of post-war France. Catholics in Poitiers, for example, marched around the city walls on September 7, to commemorate that in the summer of 1569 the city had resisted a Protestant siege, while on October 20, Montpellier's Catholics organised an annual procession to celebrate the 1622 capture of their city by Louis XIII.⁴⁷

More important, however, was the resumption of processions that marked the liturgical calendar. Although these processions were primarily linked to religious feast days, they were also part of a campaign to re-sacralise urban space and expunge the period of Protestant domination, when processions had been prohibited. Nor had La Rochelle's Catholics forgotten that despite the restoration of Catholic worship in 1599, the Protestant town council had frustrated their attempts to reintroduce processions. When in March 1600 the priests of Ste Marguerite petitioned to march through La Rochelle on Palm Sunday, the council refused their demand and posted soldiers outside the church to prevent the procession.⁴⁸ The Catholics protested this obstruction with the king, who duly ordered the city council to allow processions between Ste Marguerite and St Barthélémy, but to little effect: in 1617 they complained that the councillors were still dragging their heels in implementing the king's wishes.⁴⁹

The 1628 capture of La Rochelle turned the tables on the Protestants, however, who were also forced to decorate their homes on religious holidays, when Catholics marched through their streets carrying the Holy Sacrament. An official city ordinance, first issued in June 1631, stipulated that all citizens along the processional route had to clean their street and "hang tapestries, white cloths, and other honourable things in front of their houses," or pay a hefty fine of 500 *livres*.⁵⁰ La Rochelle's Protestants had little choice but to acquiesce, which earned them a stern rebuke from the Huguenot national synod. By December 1637, therefore, the consistory resolved to send its minister Philippe Vincent to Paris to petition the king. Vincent pointed out that by virtue of secret article 3 of the Edict of Nantes, Protestants could not be forced to decorate their homes, nor could they be charged for decorations put up by municipal authorities. His mission was only partially successful: although Louis XIII conceded that La Rochelle's Huguenots did not have to deck their houses, he ordered them to pay for the decorations put up by Catholic officials instead.⁵¹ Once Louis XIV had ascended to the throne, however, Vincent shrewdly managed to get this decision reversed, obtaining a royal letter in 1645 that suspended Protestant taxation and ordered the city council to use the proceeds of the municipal meat tax to subsidise the decorations. After protests from the Catholics, the king eventually fixed the Protestant contribution at 100 *livres* per annum.⁵² These ongoing conflicts about

processions reveal the extent to which deep-seated tensions inherited from the religious wars continued to divide Catholics and Protestants.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that memories of religious conflict cast a long shadow over post-war France, undermining the policy of coexistence mandated by the Edict of Nantes. Although the monarchy nominally prohibited French citizens from remembering the troubles, thus hoping to promote peace and reconciliation, in practice Catholics and Protestants found it difficult to forget the violence they had witnessed. An exploration of these “acts of remembering” in the city of La Rochelle shows that both sides developed deeply partisan memories of the wars. Some of the most memorable events only helped to divide them along confessional lines, including the massacre of clergy, the Protestant destruction of the sacred landscape, and the prohibition of Catholic worship. Whereas Protestants sought to downplay their involvement in these events and avoid the stigma of rebels who had resorted to violence, Catholics purposefully memorialised their suffering through a range of memory vectors, such as the rebuilding of churches and monasteries, the placement of new commemorative monuments, inscriptions, and altarpieces, as well as the reintroduction of processions that had been outlawed by the Huguenots. These memories in turn fuelled disagreements long after the wars had ended: by mid-century, Catholics and Protestants were still locked in bitter conflict over the reconstruction of churches that had been destroyed a century before, the massacres committed during the wars, and the organising of processions that had been banned for decades. The Catholic reconquest of La Rochelle, and that of many other cities in post-war France, was thus fuelled in large part by the assertion of contested memories of the troubles – memories that slowly but surely eroded the monarchy’s premise that Catholics and Protestants could live together in peace.

Notes

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- 3 Judith Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1. See also Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2011), 6–9.
- 4 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper Collins, 1980). For a useful summary, see Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 14–6.
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- 7 Edict of Nantes, article 1, in “L’édit de Nantes et ses antécédents.”
- 8 Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe*, 140–58.
- 9 Edict of Amboise, article 9, in “L’édit de Nantes et ses antécédents.” See also Olivier Christin, “Mémoire inscrite, oubli prescrit: La fin des troubles de religion en France,” *Pariser Historischer Studien* 94 (2009), 73–4.
- 10 Jotham Parsons, “The Political Vision of Antoine Loisel,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 2 (1996), 453–76; Mark Greengrass, “Amnistie et ‘oubliance’: Un discours politique autour des édits de pacification pendant les guerres de religion,” in *Paix des armes, paix des âmes* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 2000), 113–23.
- 11 Antoine Loisel, *Amnestie ou de l’oubliance des maux faits et receus pendant les troubles & à l’occasion d’iceux* (Paris: Abel l’Angelier, 1595), 29.
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- 15 Allan Tulchin, “Massacres During the French Wars of Religion,” *Past & Present Supplement* 7 (2012), 100–26; Laurent Ropp, “La violence des frères: Trois protestants méridionaux face aux massacres perpétrés par leurs coreligionnaires au temps des guerres de religion,” *Revue d’histoire du protestantisme* 5, no. 4 (2020), 197–223.
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- 17 Jean de La Haize, *Premier discours brief et veritable de ce qui s’est passé en la ville et gouvernement de la Rochelle, depuis l’an mil cinq cens soixante sept, jusques en l’année 1568*, 2nd ed. (La Rochelle: [Théophile Bouquet], 1575).

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- 25 *Ibid.*, 116; Pascal Rambeaud, *De la Rochelle vers l’Aunis: L’histoire des réformés et leurs églises dans une province française au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003), 222–3.
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- 33 MLR, MS 164, Procès-verbal of commissioners Parabère and Langlois, August 1599, ff. 24^r–25^v.
- 34 *Ibid.*, ff. 31^v–33^r; Edict of Nantes, article 76, in “L’édit de Nantes et ses antécédents.”
- 35 Hickey, “Un mécanisme pour la résolution des conflits,” 80–1.
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- 37 MLR, MS 165, Churchmasters of St Barthélémy vs. mayor of La Rochelle, November 18, 1603, ff. 1–16.
- 38 MLR, MS 165, Petition by the parishioners of St Barthélémy to Henry IV, December 7, 1603, f. 35^r; MLR, MS 165, Petition by the Catholic inhabitants of La Rochelle, 1617, articles 5 and 6, ff. 81^{r-v}.

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- 40 *Declaration du Roy, sur la reduction de la ville de La Rochelle en son obeissance, contenant l'ordre et police que Sa Maiesté veut y estre establee* (Le Mans: Veuve F. Olivier, 1628). See also Maité Recasens, “Oubliance et commémorations du siège de La Rochelle (1628–1789),” in *Les Sources du Sacré: Nouvelles approches du fait religieux*, ed. Caroline Muller and Nicolas Guyard (Lyon: LARHRA, 2018), 167–86. For the Catholic reconstruction, see François Moisy, “Le rétablissement des structures catholiques après le siège de La Rochelle (1628–1648),” *Revue du Bas-Poitou et des Provinces de l'Ouest* 82 (1971), 345–75.
- 41 *Declaration du Roy*, 7. On the history of this monastery, see Bernard Coutant, *Les Minimés, pages d'histoire rochelaise* (La Rochelle: Rupella, 1968).
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